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U.S. prepares for Thieu ouster

By RICHARD E. WARD

When a well known Vietnamese hireling of the CIA begins openly to criticize the regime of Nguyen Van Thieu, as happened recently it is evident that the end of the Saigon dictator's rule is approaching rapidly.

As popular protests and violent repression mount in the Saigon-controlled zone of South Vietnam, the U.S. appears to be simultaneously supporting and undermining its puppet leader.

Events in Vietnam and U.S. policy bear little relation to official American pronouncements. U.S. plans to dump Thieu are rapidly moving ahead, despite official indication of continuing support. Consultations are said to be taking place in Saigon between American and Vietnamese officials to construct a post-Thieu cabinet.

The Provisional Revolutionary Government, representing the patriotic forces, charged recently that the CIA was extremely active attempting to influence the course of the antiregime struggle. This activity is now being stepped up, as indicated by recent calls for an overhaul of the Saigon regime by such leading U.S. proteges as trade unionist Tran Quoc Buu.

BACKING BOTH SIDES

While CIA henchmen are joining the anti-Thieu movement, the U.S. spy agency also appears to be backing the Thieu regime's stepped-up repression. As is well known, the CIA works hand in glove with the Saigon secret police. In recent weeks, the police have jailed, placed under house arrest or wounded increasing numbers of militant protest leaders.

During the week before the statement of Tran Quoc Buu, whose trade union activity has been subsidized by the CIA at least since 1968, the U.S. embassy issued a long statement denying U.S. involvement in present political events.

The Paris daily Le Monde, whose Saigon correspondent was expelled from South Vietnam several weeks ago, stated Nov. 1 that "The CIA has been sending to Saigon its 'specialists' on Vietnam and coups. . . . For a long time the CIA has been convinced of the failure of the president [Thieu]. . . . The Americans are again seeking to whitewash the regime's facade. It is probable that they will undo a man who has served them loyally, if they find a more respectable replacement."

According to Le Monde, a high official of the Saigon regime has indicated that the "case of Thieu" will be settled before the end of the year.

According to the Guardian's sources, among the persons expected to play a prominent part in a post-Thieu government—either in office or behind the scenes—are Tran Van Lam, president of the Saigon lower house and a signer of the Paris Agreement; Tran Van Tuyen, leader of the opposition in the assembly and head of the Vietnamese "Kuomintang;" Dan Van Sung, CIA friend and publisher of the leading Saigon newspaper, Chinh Luan (Public Opinion), and trade unionist Tran Quoc Buu.

The apparent contradiction between the CIA's support both for Thieu and some of his opponents, at present, is easily explained by U.S. fears that the popular movement will lead to the ouster of Thieu and the formation of a government in which the key figures are not picked by the American embassy. The U.S. is hoping Thieu will "broaden" his regime, bring a token number of opposition leaders into the government and then resign.

Although Thieu has not accepted this plan, he has been informed of it. This was made known by correspondent James Markham of the N.Y. Times in an Oct. 22 dispatch from Saigon. Quoting publisher Sung, whose U.S. ties were not mentioned, Markham reported:

"I think that Thieu should learn the lesson of Johnson, first, and afterward Nixon," asserted Dan Van Sung. . . . Mr. Sung, who has occasionally acted as a roving ambassador for Mr. Thieu. . . said that he has advised him to announce that he will 'under no circumstances' run for reelection next year.